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Moral Allegory in Dunbar's "Golden Targe"

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Dunbar's "Goldyn Targe" is, from many points of view, a baffling poem. Critics have seldom given it the attention it deserves, and its thorough-going exploitation of rhetorical convention has tended to obstruct modern appreciation of its virtues. C. S. Lewis, certainly, praised the poem, but more as a rhetorical achievement, in the sense of verbal decoration, than as an example of allegorical statement.[1] For Lewis, indeed, the allegory itself is unimportant: "we are right to neglect it". The success of the "Goldyn Targe" is as "the allegorical form adapted to purposes of pure decoration", and elsewhere Lewis classes the "Goldyn Targe," along with "The Thrissill and the Rois," as "almost 'pure' poetry".[2]

Others followed where Lewis led, and those who discussed the poem were long agreed that the ostensible meaning of the "Targe" was unimportant. John Speirs saw Dunbar's poem as "a monument to the fact that a poem cannot be made out of an interest purely in language, and the manipulation and arrangement of it",[3] and although Kurt Wittig perceptively located Dunbar's principal interest in "the world of the senses", he joined Lewis and Speirs in dismissing the allegory as perfunctory, a conventional adjunct to the real business of vivid description for its own sake.[4] This alleged lack of interest in the *sentence* of his poem would, if it were true, separate Dunbar from all other medieval allegorists, and certainly from those who wrote in England and Scotland during the fifteenth century.

There have been three recent attempts, however, to redefine the nature of the relationship between the rhetorical virtuosity of the

1. C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (2nd edn, New York, 1958), pp. 251-2.

2. *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama* (Oxford, 1954), p. 92.

3. John Speirs, *The Scots Literary Tradition* (London, 1940), p. 56.

4. Kurt Wittig, *The Scottish Tradition in Literature* (Edinburgh, 1958), pp. 65-7.

"Goldyn Targe" and the meaning which the allegory is intended to convey. First, Denton Fox in an important article,[5] defended the poem by an analysis of its structure, discussing the ways in which Dunbar set out to decrease "the human and psychological elements" which are present in the allegorical tradition. Although he tends to agree with his predecessors in emphasising Dunbar's verbal and rhetorical preoccupations, Fox does treat the allegorical framework itself with some seriousness, and he defends the use of personification (dismissed by Lewis as a "mere catalogue") as contributing to the poem's vividness. The themes of the "Targe" are, in Fox's view, "spring and love", and Dunbar has put together a rich collection of well-established allegorical images to create a pattern of vivid "anamalit" surfaces. The "Goldyn Targe" is clear if two-dimensional: it is "not in the least evocative" (p. 330).

The content of the poem, the significance of its allegorical action, is given more weight by Tom Scott in his exposition of Dunbar's poetry.[6] Scott argues that Dunbar is deliberately using the dream device to raise questions about the reality of *amour courtois,* and his discussion emphasises the distinction between the two gardens of the "Targe:" the one in which the poet's persona falls asleep, and the one in his dream. For Scott, too, it is important that the dreamer's defender in the allegorical battle is Resoun, since "the battle in the poem is between reason and insanity" (p. 44). The "Goldyn Targe" is therefore a significant stage in Dunbar's poetic development, for it represents a rejection of "the poetry of abstraction and of romantic love". That, in Scott's opinion, is the point of the withering garden: Dunbar has recognised the essential unreality of courtly allegory, and in the Targe sets his face against romance.

For both Fox and Scott, the "Goldyn Targe" is in some sense a poem *about* poetry. In Fox's terms, the concluding stanzas, in which Dunbar applies his aureate language to praise of Chaucer, Gower and Lydgate, amount to a statement of poetic theory: it is their decorative skill which appeals to Dunbar. Scott goes further, reading the whole poem as a statement about courtly poetry itself.

> His targe of reason is no mere poetic figure: he has already decided against the poetry of *amour courtois* as being irrational to the point of madness: his poem says quite clearly that only a

5. "Dunbar's *The Golden Targe," ELH* XXVI (1959), 311-34.

6. *Dunbar: A Critical Exposition of the Poems* (Edinburgh, 1966), pp. 40-6.

> man who has lost his reason is in danger from such crazy fantasies—and he makes sure that he gets his reason back.[7]

These opinions have one thing in common: they place Dunbar's concerns within the realm of poetic convention. It is not love itself as a social and moral phenomenon which Scott sees as Dunbar's theme in the "Goldyn Targe," but rather the implications of the poetic mode, the allegory of love, a group of conventions deriving from the *Roman de la Rose*. As I hope to show in the following pages, this view does not adequately represent Dunbar's intentions in the "Goldyn Targe." Nor, indeed, is there much reason to read the "Targe" as being primarily about poetry: as Fox himself concedes, the final stanzas are in reality an example of the well-known fifteenth-century *topos* of praise of Chaucer and his school,[8] and Dunbar does little to integrate them with the theme of his allegorical dream, which has more to do with the nature of love than it has with the nature of poetry.

Progress towards a satisfactory understanding of the "Goldyn Targe" has been both furthered and put back by a recent article by R. D. S. Jack,[9] pointing out the relationship between Dunbar's poem and Lydgate's *Reson and Sensuallyte*. A major crux in the "Targe" has been the catalogue of goddesses (ll. 73-90),[10] which includes both Pallas and "prudent Minerva", and, even more surprisingly, Apollo. As long as these lapses remained unexplained, there lurked a suspicion that Dunbar was gulling his audience, creating an allegorical structure whose inconsistencies made it ludicrous. But Jack has convincingly shown that both classical gaffes, and a number of other details, are easily accounted for if Dunbar was following the catalogue of goddesses in Lydgate's poem, but not always reading accurately.

A recognition that Dunbar's allegory is indebted to Lydgate's should not blind us, however, to the differences of approach between the two poets. Jack suggests that

7. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

8. For accounts of this tradition, see W. S. Ramson, "In Praise of Chaucer", *Proceedings and Papers of the XII Congress of AULLA* (Sydney, 1970), pp. 456-76, and P. M. Kean, *Chaucer and the Making of English Poetry* (London, 1972), II, 210-39.

9. "Dunbar and Lydgate," *SSL* VIII (1971), 215-27.

10. All quotations and line references from the "Goldyn Targe" are from *The Poems of William Dunbar*, ed. W. Mackay Mackenzie (3rd edn, London, 1960), pp. 112-9.

> Lydgate and Dunbar preferred a more explicit, didactic approach to art than Chaucer as the rest of their work shows and as their theological pursuits implied.[11]

I think that this statement is misleading, in that it equates the methods of the two poets. While both may be more explicitly didactic than Chaucer, it can hardly be argued that Dunbar's use of allegory is as explicit or as didactic as Lydgate's: if that were the case, critics would scarcely have taken so long to recognise the didactic purpose of the "Goldyn Targe." It seems to me that notwithstanding the views of Fox and Jack, the "Goldyn Targe" is a remarkably allusive poem, and that its allegorical meaning is dependent upon a large number of apparently unimportant details which together create a subtle but (to Dunbar's contemporaries, at least) unmistakable moral argument.

The explication of this allegorical meaning must proceed on three main lines. The most important — and the end-point of this article — — is a definition of the *tone* of the "Goldyn Targe." It cannot be said that the degree of seriousness with which Dunbar treats his subject has been adequately sorted out. Most critics, as we have seen, have tended to undervalue the poem's allegorical significance, while Scott and Jack have in different ways asserted that the "Targe" is a very serious piece of work. How far, we must therefore ask, is the implicit *moralitas* to be taken seriously, and how far is the whole poem a courtly game, hung on an allegorical framework?

More immediately, it is necessary to define the significance of Resoun, in some ways the crucial character of the allegory. Scott's dichotomy of romantic madness and realistic rationality was the first interpretation of the "Goldyn Targe" to acknowledge the importance of Resoun within the poem, but Scott did little to set the concept of reason within its historical context. Such complex ideas have a complex and subtle history, and we cannot simply assume that "reason" meant the same things to Dunbar as it means to a twentieth-century reader. The reason/madness polarity, in particular, has a modern ring to it, and we shall have to consider the *medieval* connotations of the word before we can attempt an assessment of Resoun's place in the allegory.

Although the position of Resoun in the poem, and the links which his name has with medieval philosophy and psychology, make his interpretation particularly delicate, it is in reality one example of a wider problem: the analysis of the conventional images and structural devices of which the "Targe" is composed. For it is in almost every way

11. Jack, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

a poem dependent upon a rich literary tradition, and yet Dunbar — like other fifteenth-century allegorists — has created a unique work of art, in which the traditional elements have been reworked to produce something new and distinctive. That, surely, is why poets went on writing dream allegories: because the associated images were always open to subtle reworking, and offered at the same time an allusive richness which is well exemplified in the "Goldyn Targe." Only by a careful analysis of the traditional associations of the images he employs can we penetrate the surface richness to discover what Dunbar is saying. We shall begin where Dunbar does, with the description of a garden.

Like many another dream allegory, the "Goldyn Targe" is set in a garden, or rather, two gardens — the first, described in ll. 1-48, an actual garden in which the poet wanders at dawn, and the second in his dream, which is introduced at line 49. The qualities of this opening description are well known, for Dunbar achieves a curious mixture of rhetorical elaboration and perceptive observation, best illustrated by the frequently-quoted lines describing the reflection of shimmering light from the surface of the river onto the underside of leaves on overhanging branches:

> Doune throu the ryce a ryvir ran wyth stremys,
> So lustily agayn thai lykand lemys.
> That all the lake as lamp did leme of licht,
> Quhilk schadowit all about wyth twynkling glemis;
> That bewis bathit war in secund bemys
> Throu the reflex of Phebus visage brycht;
> (28-33)

The river, like the birds and flowers which also occur in these opening stanzas, is a traditional feature of medieval literary gardens,[12] but the reflected movement is Dunbar's own touch, and it requires the precision of a semi-technical term ("reflex") and the odd construction "secund bemys" to get it across. The overall effect of the first seventy-two lines is undeniably appealing, so that the poet's culminating description of his garden as "paradise" seems merely to be legitimate hyperbole. Significantly perhaps, the two gardens run together in our mind, for Dunbar does not himself distinguish between them, either explicitly or

12. Many of the traditional patterns of garden imagery are discussed in D. W. Robertson, Jr., "The Doctrine of Charity in Medieval Literary Gardens", *Speculum* XXVI (1951), 24-49, and in Pamela Gradon, *Form and Style in Early English Literature* (London, 1971), pp. 175-211.

by any change in his descriptive technique:[13] the "hundreth ladyes" of his dream,

> Als fresch as flouris that in May up spredis,
> In kirtillis grene, withoutyn kell or bandis:
> Thair brycht hairis hang gletering on the strandis
> In tressis clere, wyppit wyth goldyn thredis;
> With pappis-quhite, and mydlis small as wandis,
> (59-63)

seem to belong quite naturally with the bright, glossy and conventional setting of the earlier description:

> For mirth of May, wyth skippis and wyth hoppis,
> The birdis sang upon the tender croppis,
> With curiouse note, as Venus chapell clerkis:
> The rosis yong, new spreding of thair knopis,
> War powderit brycht with hevinly beriall droppis,
> Throu bemes rede birnyng as ruby sperkis;
> The skyes rang for schoutyng of the larkis,
> The purpur hevyn, our scailit in silvir sloppis,
> Ourgilt the treis, branchis, lef, and barkis.
> (19-27)

When we come to the end of the poem, however, with the dreamer's awakening, the distinction between the dream-world and the dreamer's "real" environment is of great importance. With the overthrow of Resoun, the dreamer's defence against the onslaught of the ladies, we are given four stanzas depicting the desolation which follows, which because of their crucial position in the poem I shall quote in full:

> Than was I woundit to the deth wele nere,
> And yoldyn as a wofull prisonnere
> To lady Beautee, in a moment space;
> Me thoucht scho semyt lustiar of chere,
> Efter that Resoun tynt had his eyne clere,
> Than of before, and lufliare of face:
> Quhy was thou blyndit, Resoun? quhi, allace!
> And gert ane hell my paradise appere,
> And mercy seme, quhare that I fand no grace.
>
> Dissymulance was besy me to sile,
> And Fair Calling did oft apon me smyle,
> And Cherising me fed wyth wordis fair;
> New Acquyntance enbracit me a quhile,
> And favouryt me, quhill men mycht go a myle,
> Syne tuk hir leve, I saw hir nevir mare:

13. But cf. the discussion in Scott, *op. cit.*, who takes the opposite view. Scott, however, does not really compare equivalent stanzas, since the passage he takes from the dream is in a different rhetorical mode from the earlier *descriptio loci.*

Than saw I Dangere toward me repair,
I could eschew hir presence be no wyle.
On syde scho lukit wyth ane fremyt fare,

And at the last departing coud hir dresse,
And me delyverit unto Hevynesse
For to remayne, and scho in cure me tuke.
Be this the Lord of Wyndis, wyth wodenes,
God Eolus, his bugill blew I gesse,
That with the blast the levis all to-schuke;
And sudaynly, in the space of a luke,
All was hyne went, thare was bot wilderness,
Thare was no more bot birdis, bank, and bruke.

In twynkling of ane eye to schip thai went,
And swyth up saile unto the top thai stent,
And with swift course atour the flude thay frak;
Thay fyrit gunnis wyth powder violent,
Till that the reke raise to the firmament,
The rochis all resownyt wyth the rak,
For rede it semyt that the raynbow brak;
Wyth spirit affrayde apon my fete I sprent
Amang the clewis, so careful was the crak.
(208-43)

As in many other late medieval dream-visions, it is something within the dream which awakens the poet: the "crak" of the ship's guns leads on naturally to Dunbar's "And as I did awake of my sueving" (l. 244), and we are back again with the singing birds and "halesum" landscape of the May morning.[14]

This passage surely provides, if anything does, an important key to the poem, and a closer examination reveals that it is interwoven in several ways with the rest. First, there is the very marked change (within the dream) from "paradise" to wilderness, which, as Tom Scott aptly remarks, brings to mind Dante's *selva oscura.* It is useful to remember that there are other examples, closer to Dunbar, where a wilderness signifies spiritual desolation — Chaucer's *House of Fame* and Douglas' *Palice of Honour.* But there are important ways in which Dunbar's poem differs from the others. In Dante, Chaucer and Douglas alike, the poet begins in a wilderness, and is transported to greater knowledge and happiness, whereas here the wilderness is the end-point of a process. A careful reading, moreover, introduces a qualification of the original impression that Dunbar is presenting to us a simple pattern of paradise-garden-crumbling-into-wilderness, for he says quite

14. For other examples of this *topos,* see Chaucer, *The Parliament of Fowls,* 11. 693-5, and *The Book of the Duchess,* 11. 1321-5; *The Kingis Quair,* 11. 1203-4; and Skelton, *Bowge of Courte,* 11. 530-2.

clearly that, "There was no more *bot* birdis, bank, and burke." The birds are perhaps the most significant part of this alliterative trio; for they are the traditional figures of vernal joy, and that is their function elsewhere in this poem (in the opening stanzas, and also at l. 245). And indeed, it is not the landscape itself which is primarily responsible for the change, by becoming autumnal, for example, but the company of gods and goddesses who are now leaving. The very real change in mood, which is reflected in the language and particularly in the telling rhyme-sequence frak-rak-brak-crak, seems to be more in the dreamer's attitude than in the landscape.

This suggestion that we are to concentrate more upon the dreamer's state of mind than upon the nature description takes us back to ll. 215-6, and the ambiguous use of oxymoron which they present. The blinding of Resoun, we are told, makes the dreamer's paradise *seem* a hell. That the garden is a paradise, we remember, was established as early as l. 72, one of several examples of the way in which Dunbar integrates the various parts of his poem. There are, broadly speaking, two ways in which Dunbar may be using this commonplace image. It is sometimes applied quite straightforwardly, by Machaut, for example, and the author of *The Floure and the Leafe,*[15] as part of the apparatus of allegorical description. But its popularity is no doubt due to its occurrence in the *Roman de la Rose,* in a context much like that of the "Goldyn Targe:"

> Lors entrai, sanz plus dire mot,
> par l'uis que Oiseuse overt m'ot,
> el vergier; et quant je fui enz,
> je fui liez et bauz et joienz;
> et sachiez que je cuidai estre
> por voir em paradis terrestre:
> tant estoit li leus delitables,
> qu'i sembloit estre esperitables;
> car, si come lors m'ert avis,
> il ne fet en nul paradis
> si bon estre com il fessoit
> el vergier, qui tant me plesoit.[16]

The argument, put forward by D. W. Robertson, Jr., and more recently

15. Guillaume de Machaut, *Oeuvres,* ed. E. Hoepffner (SATF, Paris 1908-21) I, 15; III, 193; *The Floure and the Leafe,* ed. D. Pearsall (London, 1962), p. 88.

16. *Le Roman de la Rose,* 11. 628-40, ed. Félix Lecoy (Paris 1965-), I, 20.

by John V. Fleming, that such lines as these in the *Roman* must be read ironically if they are to make sense in medieval terms, is a persuasive one.[17] Some, at least, of Guillaume de Lorris' readers grasped the point. It is, after all, precisely the ironic implications of the metaphor which Chaucer exploits in the *Merchant's Tale*:

> That wyf is mannes helpe and his comfort,
> His paradys terrestre, and his disport.[18]

Working in another genre, Mandeville deals with the subject of the Earthly Paradise more literally, but he too adds a note of irony: it is, indeed, the one place that he has *not* been, for "no man that is mortelle ne may not approchen to that Paradys", and again, "no man that is mortalle ne dar not entren".[19] The lover who thinks himself in Paradise, then, is indeed using strong language, and there is in Mandeville also the cautionary tale of Gathonolabes, who seduced good knights with his false "Paradise", based no doubt on garbled accounts of the cult of the Assassins and of the Islamic notion of heaven, but turned by Mandeville into a veritable Bower of Bliss.[20] No doubt there were poets who treated the *Roman de la Rose* as a kind of poetic quarry, and who used the metaphor of the Earthly Paradise without much attention to its ironic implications, but we should certainly tread warily when a medieval poet places himself, like Januarie, in Paradise.

The oxymoron which Dunbar employs, like the paradise-metaphor itself, is derived from the *Roman de la Rose,* where Reson says of love

> ce est enfers li doucereus,
> c'est paradis li doulereus;[21]

But Dunbar is actually saying something different, for the blinding of Resoun "gert ane hell my paradise *appere*", and the emphasis falls rather heavily upon the notion of appearance. It is, in fact, reaffirmed in the following line, "And mercy *seme,* quhare that I fand no grace". Either the poet is as confused as his dreamer, or Dunbar is here exploiting the contradictions deliberately, for these lines move in op-

17. Robertson, *op. cit.* and *A Preface to Chaucer* (Princeton, 1962), esp. pp. 91-104; and John V. Fleming, *The 'Roman de la Rose': A Study in Allegory and Iconography* (Princeton, 1969), esp. pp. 54-103.

18. *Canterbury Tales,* E. 1331-2, ed. F. N. Robinson (2nd edn, Cambridge, Mass., 1957), p. 116.

19. *Mandeville's Travels,* ed. M. C. Seymour (Oxford, 1967), pp. 220-1.

20. *Ibid.,* pp. 200-2.

21. *Roman de la Rose,* 11. 4297-8, *ed. cit.,* I, 133.

posite directions: in the first, the paradise-garden is (apparently) destroyed, whereas in the second it is "mercy", the lady's concession to the lover, which is illusory. This is surely oxymoron carried a stage further, so that the reader cannot be sure, any more than the dreamer can, which impressions are real and which illusory. It is only the re-awakening, to the real world of the garden in mirthful May, which enables the dreamer and his audience to make the distinction.

Much of the poem, a further examination indicates, is concerned with the related ideas of appearance, vision and looking. The crucial point in the allegorical battle is the blinding of Resoun, for which Dunbar is again indebted to the tradition of the *Roman de la Rose*. There it is Amors who fires a series of arrows, the first of which pierces the dreamer "through the eye to the heart."[22] In addition to its obvious allegorical significance, this motif has associations with the classical notion of *caecus amor,* and moral connotations to which we shall have cause to return.[23] There is a closer parallel to the "Goldyn Targe" in the contemporary *King Hart,* possibly, but in the view of its latest editor probably not, the work of Gavin Douglas.[24] In this case it is Discretioun who is blinded by Lust (ll. 281-8), and who subsequently has his sight restored by Ressoun (ll. 585 ff.). The author of *King Hart* is quite explicitly writing a moral allegory, and there is no difficulty about "reading" the poem on an allegorical level. If Dunbar's poem is more ambiguous, at least we can see that at this point there is a marked similarity between the actions of the two allegories.

Dunbar, moreover, is careful to carry the blinding of Resoun over to the dreamer, who tells us that Lady Beautee "semyt lustiar of chere,/Efter that Resoun tynt had his eyne clere" (ll. 211-2). Resoun is, of course, tropologically an aspect of the dreamer himself, and it is to be expected that the blinding of Resoun will have an effect on the dreamer's own vision. Presence, by blinding Resoun, has managed to make Beautee more beautiful, an idea which occurs in many a medieval moralist. The Dominican John Bromyard, for example, commenting on the four conditions of *amor inordinatus, siue mundialis, siue carnalis,* observes:

22. *Ibid.,* l. 1692, I, p. 52.

23. Cf. the discussion of "Blind Cupid" in E. Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology* (2nd edn, New York, 1962), pp. 95-128.

24. *The Shorter Poems of Gavin Douglas,* ed. P. J. Bawcutt (STS, Edinburgh, 1967), pp. lxxii-lxxviii.

> Secundo habent conditionem caeci, quia sicut caecus non bene discernit inter pulchrum, et foedum, ita nec isti. Vnde, versus, Si quis amat ranam, ranam putat esse dianam.[25]

And Cupid himself is portrayed as blind because, in the words of the French *Ovide moralisé*:

> Pour ce sont il paint avugle,
> Qu'amours et jex mains folz avugle.[26]

In commenting upon the dreamer's blurred vision, then, Dunbar is doing what he does throughout the poem, building traditional images into a complex, tightly-constructed pattern.

For we must not forget that it was the dreamer's eyesight which got him into trouble in the first place. Dunbar gives us a vivid impression of his dreamer, "our helit wyth levis ronk", spying on the revelling company of gods and goddesses. It is his desire to see more clearly which proves his undoing, for

> Than crap I throu the levis, and drew nere,
> Quhare that I was rycht sudaynly affrayit,
> All throu a luke, quhilk I have boucht full dere.
>
> And schortly for to speke, be lufis quene
> I was aspyit, scho bad hir archearis kene
> Go me arrest; and thay no time delayit . . . (133-8)

These lines are in fact the first clear indication of the poem's later development, although the ship of the gods, on its arrival, is likened to a "falcoune swift desyrouse of hir pray" (l. 53). And their moral significance is obvious: the dreamer must pay for his curiosity by the blinding of his reason, and become the prisoner of beauty. Appropriately to the later allegorical imagery of blinding and diminished vision, it is a "luke" which serves as synecdoche for his perilous proximity to the goddess of Love.

It is not only the dreamer's looking which is stressed. In the description of the gods, which comes immediately before the passage we have just examined, Dunbar notes a couple of times the eyes of various gods: Saturn's "luke was lyke for to perturb the aire" (l. 115), and

> Thare was the god of wyndis, Eolus,
> With variand luke, rycht lyke a lord unstable. (122-3)

25. John Bromyard, *Summa Predicantium* (Antwerp, 1614), p. 53.
26. *Ovide moralisé,* 11. 676-7, quoted in Panofsky, *op. cit.,* p. 106.

And later, when the deities are leaving, a look becomes a figure of speed or brevity, used twice within four lines (ll. 232, 235). These two passages are linked in another way as well, for it is Eolus, whose "variand luke" the dreamer noted earlier, who blows his bugle to signal the exodus.

Nor is that the only manner in which Dunbar foreshadows the subsequent disaster in his description of the gods. Apart from the usual names, his catalogue contains some less familiar figures, and unlike the list of goddesses, this catalogue was apparently composed by Dunbar himself, and not cribbed from Lydgate or his French source:

> Thare was the god of gardingis, Priapus;
> Thare was the god of wildernes, Phanus;
> And Janus, god of entree delytable;
> Thare was the god of fludis, Neptunus;
> Thare was the god of wyndis, Eolus,
> With variand luke, rycht lyke a lord unstable;
> Thare was Bacus the gladder of the table;
> Thare was Pluto, the elrich incubus,
> In cloke of grene, his court usit no sable. (118-26)

That this list is carefully managed seems certain: the juxtaposition of Priapus and Faunus is of particular importance, since Priapus is the guardian of such settings as that of the poem, and Faunus, "the god of wildernes", casts forward to l. 233 and the desolation of the dreamer's paradise. Neither is a common figure in medieval poetry: Priapus occurs twice in Chaucer, and there is at least one reference to Faunus as a single deity (who also occurs in his Greek guise as Pan).[27] This relative unfamiliarity tends to emphasise the importance of the juxtaposition to Dunbar's purpose. Janus, too, contributes to the complexity of the pattern. In Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale* and elsewhere he suggests plenty in the mid-winter wilderness, but it is his Roman role as the god of beginnings to which Dunbar alludes with the evocative phrase "entree delytable".[28] Both associations are probably relevant, and ironic in view of what happens to the dreamer's paradisaical world. But in any case, Dunbar has clearly collected in this stanza a group of pagan deities associated with the natural world in both its

27. For Priapus, see Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales,* E. 2034, *Parliament of Fowls,* l. 253, ed. cit., pp. 123, 313; for Faunus, *The Destruction of Troy,* l. 4376, ed. G. A. Panton and D. Donaldson (EETS, London, 1869-74), I, 142. Elsewhere, the fauns are plural, e.g. Lydgate, *Troy Book,* II, 11. 5652-3.

28. Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales,* F. 1239-55, ed. cit., pp. 140-1. Cf. Ovid, *Fasti,* I, 11. 117 ff.

favourable and unfavourable aspects, and in that sense it is central to the overall structure of the poet's dream.

In the crucial passage quoted earlier, however, it is not the gods but a series of allegorical personifications who play a leading part. Again, the emphasis is partly upon false appearance: Dissymulance, "of doubilnes the rute", who led the successful final assault on Resoun, now begins to *sile,* or beguile, the dreamer; a significant word since its primary meaning, in the context of falconry, is to sew up the eyes. The attentions of Venus' ladies are fraudulent and transitory. New Acquyntance embraces the dreamer briefly and departs, succeeded by Dangere, who finally hands him over to Hevynesse. Denton Fox comments on the fact that Dunbar's personifications, unlike those in the *Roman de la Rose,* do not together constitute a single personality, the object of the dreamer's love.[29] But this is perfectly natural, since Dunbar is concerned less with the beloved than with love itself, and the allegorical action of his poem embodies the course of a romantic affair, viewed from one, distinctly sceptical, standpoint.

The most important figure in the "Goldyn Targe," apart from the dreamer himself, is Resoun. Scott, of all Dunbar's critics, takes the terms of his *psychomachia* most seriously, and he argues that Resoun is opposed by the "madness" of courtly love. Such a view, however, is completely unhistorical, in that it presupposes a modern concept of rationality by which reason is equated with sanity. To understand what Dunbar meant by Resoun, it is necessary to consider medieval rather than twentieth-century approaches to psychology. The relationship between medieval poetry and the work of such men as Augustine, Peter Lombard and Aquinas is a subtle one, but it is clear that the allegorical tradition drew heavily upon the learned writers of its age. Nowhere is a recognition of this fact more important than in the definition of such complex notions as reason.

The crucial point is that in the Middle Ages, *ratio* in its fullest sense was fundamentally an ethical concept.[30] From Augustine on, theologians consistently saw reason as a kind of moral guardian, pro-

29. Fox, *op. cit.,* p. 317.

30. For the basis of much of the following discussion, see O. Lottin, *Psychologie et Morale aux XII^e et XIII^e Siècles* (Paris, 1942-60), esp. vols I, and III, 539-75. A brief summary, where a distinction is clearly made between this broad meaning of *ratio* and a narrower sense (=*ratiocinare*) can be found in C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image* (2nd edn, Cambridge, 1967), pp. 152-61.

tecting the soul against the influence of the senses. *Sensualitas,* says Peter Lombard, following Augustine, man shares with the beasts, but *ratio* is man's alone among earthly creatures.[31] This contrast, deriving ultimately from patristic sources, underlies the vernacular use of the terms "reason" and "sensuality". For Albertus Magnus and Aquinas, *ratio* provides a moral touchstone:

> In actibus autem 'bonum' et 'malum' dicitur per comparationem ad rationem, quia, ut Dionysius dicit, *bonum hominis est secundum rationem esse, malum autem quod est praeter rationem . . .* Dicuntur autem aliqui actus humani vel morales secundum quod sunt a ratione.[32]

It is through reason that man perceives the natural law which governs the universe, and the Reason of which Aquinas speaks is, from one point of view, the divine harmony which makes the universe intelligible.[33]

Some such notion probably underlies the character of Reson who figures in the *Roman de la Rose.*[34] Briefly in Guillaume de Lorris' unfinished poem, and much more extensively in Jean de Meun's continuation, Reson counsels the lover against the hazards of his passion, and Guillaume's introduction of her takes us back to the Aristotelian and Thomist notion of the mean, as well as reminding us of medieval standards of beauty:

> El ne fu joine ne chanue,
> ne fu trop haute ne trop basse,
> ne fu trop grelle ne trop crasse.
> Li oil qui en son chief estoient
> con .ii. estoilles reluisoient,
> si ot ou chief une corone:
> bien resembloit haute persone.[35]

31. Peter Lombard, *Sententiae,* II, Dist. 24, chaps. 3-5; cf. Augustine, *De trinitate,* Book XII.

32. *Summa Theologiae,* Ia2ae, q. 18, a. 5; cf. Albertus Magnus, *Summa de homine,* q. 71, a. 1, quoted by Lottin, *op. cit.,* III, p. 542. Again, the same view is to be found in Augustine, *De trinitate,* XII, 2.

33. Cf. Lottin, *op. cit.,* III, 569: "Cette raison naturelle, norme de moralité, n'est d'ailleurs que la participation en nous de la Raison ordonnatrice de toutes choses, la loi eternelle, *ratio divina.*"

34. For another view of Reson, differing in many ways from that of Robertson and Fleming, see W. Wetherbee, "The Literal and the Allegorical: Jean de Meun and the *de Planctu Naturae*", *Medieval Studies* XXXIII (1971), 264-91.

35. *Roman de la Rose,* 11. 2962-8, ed. cit., p. 91.

It is Jean de Meun, however, who develops Reson into a major figure in the poem, and who criticises disordered love at length through her words. She becomes, in a flourishing Augustinian tradition, the advocate of *amicitia,* of *caritas* against *cupiditas,* and as the poem comes full circle she makes explicit Guillaume's allegorical use of her appearance:

> l'en i puet bien trover moien,
> c'est l'amor que j'ain tant et prise,
> que je t'ai por amer aprise.[36]

Reson, indeed, is the key to an ironic reading of the *Roman,* for the lover ignores her advice and eventually rejects her offer to become his love, though not until she has propounded her moral view for the best part of seventeen hundred lines.

This tutelary role she retains in several fourteenth century allegories. She figures thus in Guillaume de Guileville's *Pelerinage de la Vie Humaine,* and although reason does not appear as a character in *Les echecs amoureux,* the importance of the concept to the scheme of the poem is well captured in the title of Lydgate's partial translation, *Reson and Sensuallyte.* It is Dame Nature who here expounds the significance of reason, basing her discussion upon the well-worn distinction between *virtus sensitiva* (the power of perception, translated as *sensuallyte*) and *intellectus* (understanding, translated as *reson*):

> Yet ferthermore, as hyt is skylle,
> To telle the y haue grete wille,
> How this vertu sensityf
> Hath oft sythe ful gret stryf
> With reson, the myghty quene,
> And hir quarel doth sustene
> Ageyns hir ful Rigorously,
> And many sythe ful folyly
> Ys to that lady debonaire
> In her workyng ful contraire,
> No thing of hir opinion;
> For, fynaly, lyche as reson
> Vnto vertu ay accordeth,
> So sensualyte discordeth,
> And hath noon other appetit
> But in bodely delyt,
> Al set to worldly vanyte.[37]

This "vertu sensityf" is indeed the *sensualitas* of Augustine and Peter Lombard, and Reson is the same basis of virtue and steadfast opponent

36. *Ibid.,* 11. 5730-2, ed. Cit., p. 176.

37. Lydgate, *Reson and Sensuallyte,* ed. Ernst Sieper (EETS, London, 1901), [11. 765-81.]

of cupidity which Aquinas invokes and which plays a leading part in the *Roman de la Rose.*[38] If this poem seems less equivocally moralistic than the *Roman,* this may simply reflect the fact that later poets give us more help than do Guillaume and Jean in choosing between the various positions adopted by their allegorical characters. In reality, it is the same moral attitude which is preached by Reson in the *Roman* and by Nature in *Les echecs* and *Reson and Sensuallyte.*

One important distinction should be made, however, between the treatment of *ratio* in Aquinas and other theological and philosophical writers, and the allegorical character who figures in the *Roman de la Rose* tradition. The ethics with which the poets are concerned are above all sexual ethics, and here the disordering power of sensuality is, for the medieval moralist, most clearly seen. The allegorical action of the "Goldyn Targe," like that of the *Roman,* is concerned with sexual love, and the moral significance of Dunbar's Resoun must be understood in this context. The overthrow of Resoun, therefore, signifies the setting loose of the senses, and it is appropriate to the point of the poem that it should be Perilouse Presence, or physical proximity, who brings about Resoun's blindness.

A further aspect of Dunbar's Resoun demands attention. The tutelary figures of that name we have encountered in the *Roman de la Rose* and some of its derivatives are female, but the Resoun who wields the golden targe is clearly male. This is not without precedent: the Reson who is a leading character in the *Assembly of Gods* is male, and so is the figure who appears briefly in *King Hart.*[39] But Dunbar seems to stress the point:

> Than come Resoun, with schelde of gold so clere,
> In plate and maille, as Mars armypotent,
> Defendit me that noble chevallere. (151-3)

The reference to Mars is particularly striking, since only a few stanzas before, "Mars, the god armypotent" has been placed among the company of gods. One might almost conclude that the masculine gods were

38. Not all fourteenth century occurrences of Reason fit within this tradition. Cf. *Piers Plowman,* where Resoun, while still a key to virtue, is placed in a social rather than an amatory context (e.g. A Text, Passus IV, B Text, Passus IV-V, C Text, Passus V-VI). More than the poets of the *Roman de la Rose* tradition, Langland is interested in the relationship between reason and conscience, who are constantly brought together in these passages.

39. *The Assembly of Gods,* ed. O. L. Triggs (EETS, London, 1896), [11. 1254 ff]; *King Hart,* 11. 585 ff., in *The Shorter Poems of Gavin Douglas,* ed. cit., p. 159.

being identified with Resoun and hence with the dreamer against his feminine attackers, were it not for the fact that the gods' court is headed by "Cupide the king", complete with his arrows, and must therefore presumably be balanced against the court of Venus rather than opposed to it. Nevertheless, the primary sense of the battle is that of a conflict of the sexes, in which it is feminine attributes which are seen as assailing the dreamer and Resoun. We do not imagine, as we do in the case of, say, the *Roman de la Rose,* a male lover going to and eventually taking the female rose, but rather a company of predatory women who attack and eventually overcome an essentially passive dreamer. The lover falling victim to forces outside his control, such as the arrows of Amors in the *Roman,* or being taken prisoner by the lady, is common enough in courtly poetry, but Dunbar's dreamer is perhaps the least active of all.[40]

The recognition that the Resoun who occupies a crucial position in the allegorical conflict is the traditional opponent of Sensuality leads us back to the garden which Dunbar describes. His account of it is, as we have already noted, a highly sensuous one, and indeed it is appropriately so. It is, after all, to the senses that natural beauty appeals, as Matthieu de Vendôme points out in his *Ars versificatoria*:

> Flos sapit, herba viret, parit arbor, fructus abundat,
> Garrit avis, rivus murmurat, aura tepet.
> Voce placent volucres, umbra nemus, aura tepore,
> Fons potu, rivus murmure, flore solum.
> Gratum murmur aquae, volucrum vox consona, florum
> Suavis odor, rivus frigidus, umbra tepens.
> Sensus quinque loci praedicti gratia pascit,
> Si collative quaeque notata notes.
> Unda juvat tactum, gustum sapor, auris amica
> Est volucris, visus gratia, naris odor.[41]

Dunbar's rhetorical description may or may not be directly indebted to Matthieu, but he is working within the same tradition, and he, like the garden, appeals to the senses. The brilliant sensuousness of the opening stanzas can be seen as part of a strategy, for the paradise in which the dreamer finds himself is illusory on several counts. The second garden is, after all, a dream, and like the first a garden of

40. There is an interesting parallel in the view of sexual relationships expressed in the *Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo, Poems of Dunbar,* ed. cit., pp. 85-97.

41. Matthieu de Vendome, *Ars versificatoria,* 111, ll. 49-58, in E. Faral, *Les arts poétiques du XII^e et du XIII^e Siècles* (Paris, 1924), p. 149.

sensuous delight. Significantly perhaps, the second garden is produced by the sensuous delights of the first:

> Quhat throu the mery foulys armony,
> And throu the ryveris soune rycht ran me by,
> On Florais mantill I slepit as I lay . . . (46-8)

But those who venture there, he finds, are liable to be attacked, and if their reason fails them, the garden can readily become a wilderness.

This interpretation is borne out by the dreamer's re-awakening. For he finds himself back in the first garden, where the birds are still singing and the world of the opening is to some extent reasserted. The language of this passage, however, suggests that something is different:

> And as I did awake of my sueving,
> The joyfull birdis merily did syng
> For myrth of Phebus tendir bemes schene;
> Suete war the vapouris, soft the morowing,
> Halesum the vale, depaynt wyth flouris ying;
> The air attemperit, sobir, and amene;
> In quhite and rede was all the felde besene,
> Throu Naturis nobil fresch anamalyng,
> In mirthfull May, of eviry moneth Quene. (244-52)

It is the adjectives in this stanza which are most striking: suete, soft, halesum, attemperit, sobir, amene, fresch. Of these, only "suete" occurs in the opening stanzas, where the dominant descriptive terms are either colours, the names of jewels used as colour-terms, or participles such as "anamalit" (which admittedly recurs here as a verbal noun), "schoutyng" or "twynkling". The later description, by contrast, conveys very little in visual terms: the adjectives are all either principally or secondarily ethical, suggesting that Dunbar (and his dreamer?) view the garden in a new light. It cannot be said, therefore, that Dunbar uses the dream/re-awakening pattern merely to get his dreamer away from an intolerable situation, away from a dream which is becoming a nightmare. For there is some evidence in the language of the poem that the dreamer has learnt something from his experience, and now sees his natural environment as an expression of temperate virtue rather than of intemperate sensuality.

It follows from this argument that the "Goldyn Targe" is a more serious poem, in theme at least, than some earlier critics have been prepared to admit. It belongs thematically with "The Merle and the Nychtingaill" and "Of Love Erdly and Divine," which, although written in different genres, also have as their theme the contrast of virtue with

the dangers of sexual love.[42] Dunbar, following a well-trodden path within the moral-allegorical tradition of the *Roman de la Rose,* is not primarily concerned with courtly love and its rules, or with the writing of courtly poetry, but with the evils of an immoderate concern with the pleasures of the senses. To this extent, Jack is correct when he links the "Goldyn Targe" with Lydgate's *Reson and Sensuallyte.*

A comparison of the two poems, however, reveals that the differences in method between them are at least as important as their thematic similarity. Throughout Lydgate's poem, allegorical figures are set against one another in patterns which are always immediately intelligible on the symbolic level: the moral view which Lydgate is purveying always dictates what will happen in the poetry itself. In the "Goldyn Targe" on the other hand, the balance between *sentence* and *solas* is reversed, so much so that the moral point of the poem is virtually obscured. To put it another way, the dullness of Lydgate's poem derives from the fact that he says too much, while the obscurity of Dunbar's is caused by the fact that he doesn't tell us enough. It is because of this technique, of evocation rather than of direct statement, that interpretation of the "Goldyn Targe" is so difficult — nobody has ever suggested that *Reson and Sensuallyte* is "pure poetry", an attack on courtly love from the inside, or a poem about poetry. That it should be claimed that the theme is sensuality in a fifteenth century poem where neither sensuality nor the senses are directly mentioned may seem bizarre, the extreme of "Robertsonianism", but then Dunbar was relying upon a sophisticated court audience, familiar with the rich background of the conventional images, characters and situations which he employed.

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42. *Poems of Dunbar,* ed. cit., pp. 134-7, 101-4.